ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE OF AFRICAN SLAVERY AND SLAVE TRADE SAGA: PAST AND PRESENT

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Abstract

Long since memorial, slavery and slave trade has been in existence in the world. Nevertheless, in the 21st century, this unethical trade has never stopped. Though, there are many reasons contributing to that, be it political, economic, religious and historical. However, Islam has always been pushed to the middle of the slavery saga. This paper has focused on the Islamic legal teachings on slavery and slave tread. And then the paper has as well identify the really perpetrators of the African slavery and slave tread An attempt has also been made to totally delink Islam from slavery and clarifying some misconceptions about it.

Many people have been confusingly or deliberately relating slavery with Islam. Perhaps this is the most horrible form of doubt exploited by the Western powers in order to divert the blame to where it belongs. In the 21st century some misinterpretations about the Qur'an and Sunnah texts regarding slavery and slave trade in Islam are spread all over. Many books, articles, internets programmes and mass media both electronic and printing are still spreading this confusion to the world. Major arguments of associating slavery with Islam has always been the history of the prisoners of war captured during Prophet's battles with non-Muslims through offensive or defensive wars, and the history of the 18th and 19th century's East African slave trade. The researcher shall therefore use historical and comparative study methods to come up with a comprehensive and conclusive answer to the above mentioned objectives.

The paper shall consequently include the following, Definition of the key words, a brief History of Slavery and its Origin, Islamic Viewpoint of Slavery and Slave Trade, Misconceptions and Misinterpretations about Slavery in Islam, who were true perpetrators of Slavery and Slave Trade? African Muslim slaves in Diaspora. Conclusion and References.

Abbreviations used in this paper

(A.H): After *Hijrah* (Migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah).

(A.S): *Alayhumu-s-Salaam* (Peace be upon them or peace be upon him)

(C.E): Common Era/ Christian era.

(R.A): *Radhi-Allahu 'Anhu* (May Allah be pleased with him).

(Hadith): Is a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad

(Hadith Qudusi): Hadith Qudsi only concept (meaning) is revealed to prophet and prophet express it by his own words.

(S.W): *Subhanhu wa Ta'ala* (The Glorified Exalted).

(S.A.W): *Salla-Allahu 'Alayhi Wa Sallam* (Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him).

(STD): Standard

(PBUH): Peace be upon him.

Introduction

The concept of slavery and slave trade is not a new phenomenon in the history of humanity. In my opinion slavery, is part of an inborn character derived from the concept of inferiority and superiority complex. Thus, each human being is born with these complexes. Some are born with inferiority complexes while other are born with superiority ones. Through my study, I discovered several factors contributing to the inferiority complex, below are some of the possible causes:

- Naturally born inferior due to lack of confidence, curgusness, and braveness and full of courwardness.
- One's skin colour when is different from others. (For example when you are dark skinned in the middle of white skinned people).
- To be called bad names such lazy, stupid, idiot or fool by parents, teachers and upper class.
- Being physically weaker than your colleagues and friends in school or place of work.
- Feeling ugly compared to your peers.
- Coming from a lower social class (economic, academic,) than that of your friends.

Generally speaking, an inferiority complex happens when there is something different about you that makes you feel inferior. Note that this will only happen if you regarded that difference as a disadvantage.

Similarly, superiority complex is contributed by the opposite of the above mention causes:

- Born superior by nature.

- Coming from a well off family.
- Good looking better than average, in terms of face, colure and personality.
- Over appreciation by parents, teachers and friends.
- Being in a company of friends who are fixed minded that you are always right.
- Being living in a luxury environment without any challenges be it economic, social or political.
- More intelligent/Smarter than the rest of the people surrounding you.
- Eloquence and refined language without much abusive words.

For many decades the question of slavery and slave trade has been a controversy issue to many people non-Muslims and even Muslims. Many people have been confusingly or deliberately related slavery with Islam. Perhaps this is the most horrible form of doubt exploited by the capitalists and the Western powers in order to shake the faith of the Muslims and the non-Muslims regarding the religion of Islam. Even in the 21st century many books, articles, internets and mass media (electronic/printing) are in front line in spreading this immoral confusion to the world. Their major arguments of associating slavery to Islam have always been derived from the history of the booty captured during Prophet's battles with non-Muslims either through offensive or defensive wars, and as well as the history of the 18th and 19th century's slave trade. The study shall therefore treat this topic historical, based on a perspective of comparative religions (Islam/ Christianity) with some scriptural established evidences on who were the true perpetrators of slavery and slave trade. We intend to discuss this topic with an open mind and without allowing ourselves to be hoodwinked by some misinformation about the same. The paper shall include the following major sub-topics; Definitions, A brief History of Slavery and its Origin, Islamic Viewpoint of Slavery and Slave Trade, Misconceptions and Misinterpretations about Slavery in Islam, Who were true perpetrators of Slavery and Slave Trade? Finally, there shall be a Conclusion, abbreviations used in the paper and References.

Definition of the Key words

The term **Islam** ……..

The term **Slave** in Arabic is *Al-a'bdu* which means a human being who his/her ownership is owned by a master. During the time of Prophet Muhammad (saw) slavery and slave trade was part of the Arab tread. In an approach of discouraging the culture of slavery, the Prophet started by changing the term from *Al-a'bdu* to *Ar-Riqq*. The word *Raqiiq* is derived from the root word *Ar-Raqqah* meaning gentleness, which is the opposite of harshness. He did so because the Arabs used to misshandle their slaves. The term was changed during the lifetimes of the Prophet (saw) as a way of starting to abolish slavery and slave tread.

However, the term *Al-a'bdu* in Arabic literally means a savant. The word *Al-a'bdu* is a general term, which can also imply a savant of Allah (*A'bdu lillahi*).

This was a first step to show that Islam was against slavery and that if one owns a slave he/she must be treated gentle and kindly by his/her master. He should not treat him/her harshly by virtue of being owned by his/her master (Al-Jaza'iry, vol: 2, 2001.p.548).

The concept of slavery has never been there in Islam. Every human being is born by his/her mother as a free person. Thus, is reported by *Abu Hurairah* that the Prophet in an authenticated Hadith *Al-Qudusi* stated:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال قال الله ثلاثة أنا خصمهم يوم القيامة أعطى بي ثم غدر، ورجل باع حرا فأكل ثمنه، ورجل استأجر أجيرا فاستوفى منه ولم يعط أجره.

That Allah says: *"Three categories of people I shall impose war against them in the day of judgment, a man gave for my sake and then betrayed, a man sold a free human being and ate the price and a mad hired a person to work for him and did not pay his wages*."[1]

By the time the League of Nations was set up after the First World War, Prophet Muhammad (saw) had already prohibited slavery and slave tread. Among its objectives was to completely abolish slavery. Eventually, this led to slavery convention. The convention signed in September 1926 and came into force in March 1927 defined slavery as:

> *"Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. The slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired*

[1] Collected by Bukhari, vol: 2, in the book of sale, chapter: The sin of selling a free person. رواه البخاري في كتاب البيوع، باب اثم من باع حرا- الجزء رقم الثاني

with a view to being sold or exchanged, and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves."[1]

The word **Manumission** in Arabic is *Fakku*[2] which means to free someone who is owned as a slave and liberate him/her from the bondage of slavery. The ruling for manumission in Islam is encouraged and recommended. In fact Islam came to solve the problem of slavery that already existed in Arabian Peninsula by encouraging people to set them free.[3]

At-Tadbir, the word ***At-Tadbir*** is an attached promised of manumission of a slave upon the death of his owner, by saying to his/her slave, *"You are free after my death."* So when the master dies, the slave is manumitted.[4]

Al-Mukatab, is a slave whose master frees him when he pays his/her master some wealth in designated instalments. When completed, he/she is given a deed in writing. So when he finishes making his payments at their appointed times, he/she is free.[5]

Al-Wala', is a form of family relation because of the beneficence of manumission. Whoever frees a slave in any manner, that manumission becomes a bond of relationship for him. So if he (slave) dies and does not leave any male relatives from his family members, the one who freed him and his male relatives become the male relatives of this manumitted slave.[6]

A Brief History of Slavery and it Origin

Slavery is originated as a result of social hostilities and conflict of interest among societies which started with the two sons of Adam and Eve. The story of Adam's sons *Habil* and *Qabil* (Abel and Cain) is found in both the Qur'an and the Bible[7]. Although

[1] Cox, Baroness Caroline and John Marks (2006) *This Immoral Trade Slavery in the 21st Century*. Monarch Books, UK.p.117

[2] The Qur'an 90:13

[3] Al-Jaza'iry, Abu Bakar Jabir (2001). *Minhaj Al-Muslim vol: 2 a book of Creed, Manners, Character, Acts of Worship and other Deeds.* Darussalm, Riyadh.p.548-566.

[4] Ibid.p.556

[5] Ibid.p.559

[6] Ibid.p.564

[7] Qur'an, 5:27. Bible, Gen, 4:1-8, Good News Bible

this cannot be regarded as slavery, it illustrates the origin of social conflicts and dispute of interests which later led to slavery.[1] Slavery was also mentioned in divinely scriptures such as the original *Tawrat* and the *Injil*. In the Qur'an as well as in the Bible slavery has been mentioned in several places. In both books, the story of *Hajar*, the mother of *Islama'il,* the son of Ibrahim (Abraham) who is known as a close friend of Allah (sw) was a slave girl that the King of Egypt gave as a gift to *Sarah*, the first wife of Ibrahim. Then she (*Sarah*) gave her (*Hajar*) to her husband, Ibrahim as a gift. So Ibrahim took her as a concubine, and gave birth to a son who was called *Isma'il*. [2]

However, slavery has been known among humanity for thousands of years. It was found to exist among the most ancient people of the world, like Egyptians, the Chinese, the Indians, the Greeks, the Romans the Arabs and even the Africans. Based on the above brief history of slavery and it origin we find that slavery is a product of social hostilities, which is caused by conflict of interests in society. Hence, slavery is not a new concept. It is as old as human history itself. When you read the history of the Prophets of Allah (sw), you will find slavery existed even in their societies. Some of the Prophets were as well victims of slavery. For example, Prophet Yusuf was sold as a slave after being thrown away by his own brothers.[3]

The origin of slavery and slave trade can be driven from the following major causes:

1. During war, when a group of people or community wage war against another group, and conquer them by force, they would take their men, women and children as captives. In our modern time, such captives are known as prisoners of war.[4]

2. Poverty, many cases of poverty have led people to selling their children, relatives to other people as slaves for the survival of their living.

3. Kidnapping by stealing and pirating, large groups from Europe and Arabia used to come to Africa and seize blacks and sell them in slave trade markets both in Europe and Arabia. Likewise, the bandits from the sea tariff Europeans would attack the passing ships on the open sea and seize the people who were on board.

[1] Sendaro, 1997.p.1

[2] Qur'an, 14: 35-37, Bible, Gal 5:22-23.

[3] Qur'an, 12:8-12, Bible, Genesis 37:12-36.

[4] In this paper the term slave in Islam shall mean prisoners/captives of war between Muslims against disbelievers as it is indicated in both the Qur'an and Sunnah.

> When they overpowered them, they would sell them in slave markets in Europe and consume their price.[1]

Historically, slavery was there many centuries even before the birth of Prophet Jesus (pbuh). Many empires were built on slave labourers. For example, the Greek empire, the Egyptian empire, the Roman Empire to mention but few were constructed through slavery and slave trade (Kheir, & Yahya 2007.p.363-368). Although slavery and slave trade contributed a lot to the world civilization and improved many lives of some societies, this does not mean that it was something accepted by Allah (sw) neither by Islam, thus, in several places in the Qur'an Allah (sw) condemned slavery and slave trade in the strongest terms (Qur'an 2:49, 7:103-108, 10:44-45). Therefore those who associate Islam with slavery and slave trade, they, either do it ignorantly or deliberately to distort the emerge of Islam.

Islamic Viewpoint of Slavery and Slave Trade

Islam has often been characterized by many Christian writers as a religion which not only tolerated slavery but also encouraged it. This is a serious accusation directed against Islam. Cox, Baroness and John Marks in their book claimed that:

> *"Islam has been associated with many Islamic societies for most of the 1,400 years of Islam's existence, ranging from Arabia and surrounding countries at the heart of Islam to North Africa in the west and what is now as Pakistan and Indonesia in the east. some Islamic states, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Khanate, and the Sokoto caliphate, must be termed slave societies because slaves there were very important numerically as well as a focus of the polities' energies. This is no accident, since the Koran itself regulates the practice of slavery and thus implicitly accepts it, while Muhammad and some of his companions owned salves and obtained more by conquest".* [2]

The term slave (*Al-a'bdu* or *Ar-Riqq*) in Arabic language, and the practice of slave trade, were there in Arabian Peninsula even before the coming of Prophet Muhammad (saw).

[1] Al-Jaza'iry, Abu Bakar Jabir (2001). *Minhaj Al-Muslim vol: 2 a book of Creed, Manners, Character, Acts of Worship and other Deeds.* Darussalam, Riyadh.p.548-549.

[2] Cox, Baroness Caroline and John Marks (2006). *This Immoral Trade Slavery in the 21st Century*, Monarch books Oxford, UK. p.120

When Prophet Muhammad (saw) came with his Islamic call (*Da'wah*), Arabs were already involved in the slave trade long ago. Arabs in pre-Islamic days were as bad offenders as their neighbours. Slaves were a commercial commodity, and slavery was an established institution. It was a source of income, livelihood and a source of labour for thousands of people. Slaves were considered a symbol of status to the elites. This was the state of affairs at the advent of Islam. Slavery offended the spirit of Islam as much as idolatry did. While idolatry had its roots in spiritualism, slavery had its roots in commerce, social structure, agriculture etc. How was then slavery to be eradicated?

Islam's war against slavery never used force, but aimed at changing the attitude and mentality of the whole society, so that after emancipation, slaves would become its full-fledged members of the society, without any need of demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience and racial riots. Islam succeeded to achieve this impossible objective without any war that could lead to use of sword or blood spilled.

Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) came forcefully to fight against the business of slavery. Hence, Islam introduced various ways of freeing the slaves from their masters as a form of penalty for whoever commits the following:

- When a man had sexual intercourse with his wife in the daytime of *Ramadhan,* among the penalty is to free a slave.
- A Muslim who killed a fellow Muslim by mistake he/she has to set a slave free.[1]
- When a Muslim commits *Dhihar*, which is to say to his wife "*you are like the back of my mother*" such an evil utterance was very rampant in Arabian culture, he has to free a slave.[2]
- A Muslim who fails to fulfil a sworn oath he is also required to set a slave free.[3]

Other ways introduced by *Shari'ah* to set slave free includes:

- Slaves who could buy their freedom were immediately freed.

[1] The Qur'an 4:92

[2] The Qur'an 58:2-3

[3] The Qur'an 5:89

- Slaves who embraced Islam became free immediately.
- Slaves who taught a number of Muslims how to read and write were left free.
- Slave women who got legally married to their masters automatically became free likewise their children.[1]
- Among the best righteous deeds loved by Allah (sw) that merit paradise is the paying of ransom for a slave in order to let him/her gain freedom.[2] During the Prophet's battles against the disbelievers, the term slave (*Al-a'bdu*) was used to referrer to the captives of war. So Islam in this matter, inherited the term but with a different meaning. Whenever you read permissibility of slavery in the Qur'an and Sunnah, it always means prisoners of war and not the 18th and 19th century slavery which many people twisted to associate Islam with. In the other hand People non-Muslim in particular, and Muslim in general need to understand that there is a big different between Arabs and Islam. Hence, when an Arab man came with the 18th and 19th century slavery in East Africa, Islam had already prohibited that tread long ago even before the slavery convention of 1926. Therefore that tread which was brought by Europeans and Arabs should never be associated with Islam. It is indeed very unfair and logically wrong to judge any religion by the deeds of its followers. Always the religion should be judge by it scripture.

Islam being a true religion of Allah (sw) has not allowed any form of slavery except the captives of war. In today's terminology, they are known as prisoners of war. Thus, if we may say that Islam allowed slavery, under strict conditions and very temporarily were the captives of war who were captured as prisoners of war. Allah (sw) permitted the taking of prisoners of war if the land of the enemy has been subdued. Allah (sw) said to the Prophet Muhammad (saw),

مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَن يَكُونَ لَهُۥٓ أَسۡرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ يُثۡخِنَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ تُرِيدُونَ
عَرَضَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ٦٧

[1] The Qur'an 4:25

[2] The Qur'an 2:177, 90:13-18. See also Kheir, Abdallah and Yahya Atey (2007) *IRE Text Book Series: Essential Islamic Studies Book Four.* Ummah Foundation, Nairobi. p.372.

"It is not fitting for a Prophet that he should have prisoners of war until he has thoroughly subdued the land. Are you looking for the temporal goods of this world; but Allah wants for you the Hereafter: and Allah is exalted in Might, Wise."[1]

Islam has allowed the concept of prisoners of war as a mercy to humans, because many people before the coming of Islam, when they go to war against their enemies, and acquire victory many of them are led by their victory to committing corrupt acts by killing the women and children to take revenge against their men. Hence, Islam allowed its followers to take the women and children as captives of war, firstly in order to protect their lives, and secondly, to facilitate their happiness and their eventual liberation. As for the male warriors when captured, Islam has given the option of being beneficent to them, either by freeing them without any payment of wealth or ransoming them for wealth or weapons or men.[2] Allah (sw) says:

فَإِذَا لَقِيتُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَضَرۡبَ ٱلرِّقَابِ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَثۡخَنتُمُوهُمۡ
فَشُدُّواْ ٱلۡوَثَاقَ فَإِمَّا مَنَّۢا بَعۡدُ وَإِمَّا فِدَآءً حَتَّىٰ تَضَعَ ٱلۡحَرۡبُ
أَوۡزَارَهَاۚ

"So, when you meet (in war) those who disbelieve, smite (their) necks till when you have killed and wounded many of them, then bind a bond firmly. Thereafter (is the time) either for generosity or ransom, until war lays down its burden" [3]

Many non-Muslims misconceive these types of verses in the Qur'an by clamming that Islam encourages the killing of disbelievers where ever they find them. This is a misinterpretation of such verses. In this particular verse Allah (sw) is informing the Muslims that Islam is not a religion that allows cruelty and discrimination to be done to its followers. When a Muslim is slapped on one cheek, he/she is not allowed to give another cheek to be slapped again. Instead is supposed to defend and protect him/her self

[1] The Qur'an 8:67.

[2] Al-Jaza'iry, Abu Bakar Jabir (2001). *Minhaj Al-Muslim* vol: 2, *a book of Creed, Manners, Character, Acts of Worship and other Deeds.* Darussalam, Riyadh.p.549-550

[3] The Qur'an 47:4

in which ever means possible. Thus, Allah (sw) permitted the Muslims to fight in order to remove oppression, tyranny and persecution solely for the cause of Allah (sw). Wars fought for material life such as territory, trade, tribe, military glory, oil, gold and diamond etc, are strongly condemned in Islam).[1] The permission to fight and take prisoners of war as captives/prisoners of war (slaves) was not only given to the followers of Prophet Muhammad (saw) but also to the people of the Bible when God told the Jews:

> *"when the Lord your God gives you victory in battle and you take prisoners, you may see among them a beautiful woman that you like and want to marry, take her to your home, where she will shave her head, cut her fingernails, and change her clothes…after that, you marry her. Later, if you no longer want her, you are to let her go free…you cannot treat her as a slave and sell her."*[2]

However, from the Islamic point of view, all human beings are born free and such are entitled to equality and freedom. The Islamic stand is that all human beings are the creatures of the Almighty Allah (sw), thus, all human beings are equal in the sight of Allah (sw). These distinctions of colour, class, race, territory, socio-economic status or worldly power have nothing to do with Islam. Human beings are to be respected and honoured not because they are white, black, and wealthy. Thus Allah (sw) says:

۞وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِىٓ ءَادَمَ وَحَمَلْنَٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَٰهُم مِّنَ
ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ وَفَضَّلْنَٰهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٧٠﴾

"we have indeed honoured the sons of Adam provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation" (Qur'an 17:70)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَٰكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَآئِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

[1] Kheir, & Yahya A. 2007.p.371

[2] The Bible, Deuteronomy, 21: 10-14, Good News Bible

> ***"O mankind we have indeed created you from a male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another indeed the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed Allah knows and acquainted with all."*** (Qur'an 49:13)

The Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*) is therefore totally opposes and forbids Muslims from buying and selling fellow human beings as slaves to be exploited in any form whether for labour or otherwise. During the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and even after his death, several members of his companions paid a lot of wealth to the non-Muslim masters to set some slave free. This type of generosity has been reported by A'amir ibn Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr saying:

> *"Abu Bakar As-Sidiq used to free slaves and make them willingly to accept Islam in Makkah. He set free elderly men and women upon their acceptance of Islam, his father (Abu Quhafah) said to him: My son, I see that you are freeing weak slaves. If you want to continue doing what you do, why don't you free powerful men who could defend and protect you? Abu Bakar said: my effort in this regard is solely for the sake of Allah. It was about him that the verse of the Qur'an 92:1 was revealed"* (quoted by Kheir, & Yahya 2007.p.369)

Allah (sw) further clarified that slavery was and still is a way of a human beings exploiting their fellow human beings for their own desires and interest such intense forms of exploitation was condemned regardless of race, tribe, clan, or socio-economic status (Qur'an 10:44-45). According to these beautiful teachings of Islam, Muslims are encouraged to set their prisoners of war (slaves) free in anticipation of receiving great rewards from Allah (sw). Hence, it is a great misconception and distortion for one to claim that Islam supports slavery, for indeed given all the above points we can beyond any reasonable doubt see that Islam by all means came to abolish slavery which was rampant all over the world. The nineteenth century moves to abolish slavery in Europe had already been taken by events because it was already been abolished by Islam during the life time of Prophet Muhammad (saw). (Kheir, & Yahya 2007.p.372).

Those Muslims who are still practicing their tribal culture that allows and encourages slavery and slave tread in the 21st century should vividly know that Islam is totally prohibiting that even if culturally allowed. Such *Jahiliya* cultures, should be understood that they are not Islamic neither does Islam permits them.

Treatment of the Slave in Islam

In many nations and societies in the world, the treatment of slaves did not differ greatly as in the case of Islam. In communities excluding the Islamic community, a slave was considered a commodity that was used for everything and for all purposes. Along with this, a slave would be starved, beaten, burned with fire, chop off their limbs, tortured and forced to bear what he/she was not able to bear for no reasons. For example, the slave in the Roman Empire was considered a mere commodity and not a human being. As mentioned above, they enjoyed no rights, they were never fed properly but given provisions just sufficient to keep them alive and fit to do their work. During the work they were whipped for no reason. At the end of the day large groups of more than twenty men are put together to sleep in a dark small room (Qutb, 2000.p.27)

However, a slave in Islam would be treated in a manner that was befitting the nobility and honour of a human being. Islam is totally forbidding the beating, torturing and killing of the captives of war (slaves). Islam commanded in both Qur'an and Sunnah for the slave to be treated with kindness and honour. (Al-Jaza'iry, vol:2, 2001.p.550-554) Allah Says:

وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَٰنًا
وَبِذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱلْجَارِ ذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ
وَٱلْجَارِ ٱلْجُنُبِ وَٱلصَّاحِبِ بِٱلْجَنۢبِ وَٱبْنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَمَا
مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُكُمْ

"And do good to parents, kinfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbour who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those whom your right hands possess (prisoners of war)". (Qur'an 4:36)

The Prophet (saw) is also reported to have said:

> *"They (prisoners of war) are your brother and servants. Allah has placed them beneath your hands (i.e. under your authority). So whoever's brother is beneath his hand, let him feed him from that which he eats and clothe him with what he wears. And do not burden them with what is too much for them. And if you give them some burdensome task, then help them with it."* (Collected by Muslim)

In another Hadith the Prophet (saw) says:

> "*Whoever strikes his slave or beats him, his compensation is to free him.*" (Collected by Muslim)

Misconceptions and Misinterpretations about Slavery in Islam

In our contemporary world, the common and widespread misconception, misinterpretation, misrepresentation and deliberate distortion used to shame Islam and Muslims, is the false claim and accusation that Islam carried out and perpetuated slavery and slave trade. In this regard, the enemies of Islam create a lot of doubts and confusion especially when they wrongly quote statements from some classical Islamic sources and sometimes misinterpret the Qur'an and Sunnah to suit their distortion mission.

Misconceptions:

Among the major misconceptions used by the enemies of Islam is derived from some individual Arabs who were used as agents for Europeans in collecting slaves and ivory from the hinterland of East Africa to the coast. Unfortunately, those individual Arabs who worked for the European slave dealers in Zanzibar happen to be Muslims, and for such reason, they are taken as evidence that Islam supported/supports slavery and slave trade. This claim overlooked the following factors:

1. Arabism is not Islam and not all Arabs are Muslims. Arabism is an identity of the Arab race; there are those who are Muslims, non-practising Muslims as well as non-Muslims. As a race therefore it has nothing to do with Islam. On the other hand, Islam is a total way of life which is based on the belief in Allah (sw) alone that has no partners, and Muhammad (saw) is the last Messenger of Allah. Islam therefore means the total submission to the Almighty Allah (sw) by obeying all His commandments and stay away from all what is forbidden.

2. There are many Muslims who are non-Arabs. Currently, majority of Muslims in the world are non-Arabs living in Asia, F East, Africa and in the Western world. Out of the total Muslim population of 1.2 billion in the world, only about a quarter are Arabs. Today the largest numbers of Muslims are in Indonesia with a population of over 150 million. In India alone, there are 120 million Muslims. These are more than the largest Arab Muslim country, i.e. Egypt which has about 50 million Muslims.

3. The authorities who took part in the Zanzibar slavery and slave trade were not representing Islam. Thus, the Sultan of Zanzibar changed his title from Imam (religious leader) to Sultan (political leader). He avoided to be called Imam

for fear that he would appear to be too religious to the liking of the European missionaries who were dealing in slave trade in Zanzibar (Mohamed, Sendaro.1997.p.23).

4. Among their misconception is that Europeans were the ones stopped slave trade under humanitarians' argument. This is an open lying to the world. The main reason for Europeans to stop slave trade was because slaves were no longer profitable to Europe. Due to new technology, slave labour became out of fashion and redundant for capitalism economy. It is worth mentioning here that during the slavery convention signed in September 1926 and came into force in March 1927 to stop slavery, Prophet Muhammad (saw) had already prohibited that immoral tread during his lifetime (Mohamed, Sendaro.1997.p.25).

Misinterpretations:

With regards to slavery and slave trade, many people especial the non-Muslims have committed a lot of misinterpretations by quoting the Qur'an, Sunnah and some classic books of Islamic jurisprudence to show that Islam supports it. We shall therefore try to clarify those major misinterpretations so that to removing the confusion created either ignorantly or deliberately.

However, we shall only discuss two major misinterpretations that are always being committed by many people when it comes to issue of slavery and slave trade:

1. Slavery
2. Concubines

Misinterpretation of Slavery in the Qur'an and Sunnah:

As I have mentioned earlier that the word slavery legalised in the Qur'an and Sunnah reefers to prisoners of war and not kidnapped free people. It should also be clear that prisoners of war in Islam are only used as a temporary condition not as a permanent and inheritable state of inferiority.

It may be asked why Islam did not make slavery illegal at once? It should be understood that slavery was widely practised when the Prophet began his mission. Slaves came through three sources: captives of war, kidnapping and debtors who could not repay their debts. What Islam did was to close the door of new slaves, forbade enslavement through kidnapping and then recommended the use of *zakat* and charity to help the debtors.

This left only prisoners of war, and war in Islam was and is permitted only to repel aggression or to remove human tyranny. Since there were no prison camps at that time, the captured fighters were place in bondage under the supervision of the Muslims who had participated in the battles, until the end of hostilities brought security, after which they could be ransomed or freed or exchanged for Muslims prisoners of war (IET, TTC in Da'wah and Dialogue. 1997 p.21-22).

Mr. Cox B.C and Dr. John Marks in their book quoted (Qur'an 16:71, 30:28) and claimed that the Qur'an recognises the basic inequality between master and slave and the rights of the former over the latter (Cox B.C. & Dr. J. Marks, 2006.p.141-142).

This is another misinterpretation of the Islamic text. In Qur'an 16:71 Allah (sw) set this example to the pagans who associated false deities with Allah, that they would not agree to share their wealth and properties with their slaves, then how do they agree to share false deities with Allah in His worship? (Al-Hilali & M.M.Khan 1404 A.H.p.357).

And in Qur'an 30:28 Allah (sw) is asking the pagans: How do you join to Me partners of that which I created, while you for yourselves will not accept partners from your slaves? (Al-Hilali & M.M. Khan 1404 A.H.p.543). Now, for God's sake, where is that basic inequality between master and slave recognised by Allah (sw) in these two divine texts? This is how some people distort the image of Islam and Muslims by misinterpreting the major sources of Islam.

Misinterpretation of Concubine in the Qur'an and Sunnah:

Even before the coming of Prophet Muhammad (saw), the concept of Concubine was a widespread practice in the world generally, and in the Semitic lands specifically. It was a form of slavery for women, and just like any other slavery in general concubine is unacceptable in Islam. In the Qur'an, Allah (sw) recommended that instead of taking a female slave as a concubine, a man should rather free her and offers to marry her (Qur'an 24:32, 4:3 & 4:25). All these Qur'anic verses are encouraging marring the slave girls those who are in possess of Muslim men instead of making them concubines. The Prophet himself (saw) recommended this in several traditions (Bukhari 3:31, Muslim 16: 14 etc). The Prophet (saw) never stopped there but he set example in this respect by freeing and marring slave girls (e.g. *Juwiriyah bint Harith* and *Safiyah bint Huyaiy)* who were both prisoners of war. Another example was that of *Mariyah* the Copt a slave girl who was sent to him as a gift from the Christian ruler of Egypt, she became a Muslim and the Prophet married her and gave birth to Ibrahim one of the Prophet's sons. Unfortunately, some of the Orientalist misinterpreted this marriage by claiming that:

"*Muhammad had sexual relations with Mariyah, his Coptic salve*" (Silas, in '*Slavery in Islam'* p.2.)

Mr. Silas then quoted the following verses and several others in his paper saying that:

"*While I think it's nice to allow a slave to obtain his freedom, it is tragic that Islam allows them to be enslaved in the first place. That's like robbing a bank and giving some of the money back to the bank, and thinking you did the right thing!"* (Silas, in 'Slavery in Islam' p.2)

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِىُّ إِنَّآ أَحْلَلْنَا لَكَ أَزْوَٰجَكَ ٱلَّـٰتِىٓ ءَاتَيْتَ أُجُورَهُنَّ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ يَمِينُكَ مِمَّآ أَفَآءَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ

"O Prophet (Muhammad) verily, we have made lawful to you your wives, to whom you have paid their bridal dowries and those (slaves) whom your right hand possesses whom Allah has given to you…" (Qur'an 33:50) Other verses included (Qur'an 23:6, 70:30,).

The Qura'nic verses mentioned above, are all talking about slave-girls (concubines). One important fact that Mr. Silas did not understand is that Islam never came with this culture. This behaviour was there before the coming of Prophet Muhammad. Thus, in the Bible in several places concubines are mentioned. For example; (Bible 2 Chronicles 24:3, 15 and 16, Geneses 16:3, 25:1, 1 Kings 11:3, Exodus 2:21-22, Numbers 12:1) just to mention but few.

Unlike in Christianity, in Islam those who remained as concubines, their status were raised when Islam came due to the general improvement in the status and treatment of slaves. The women prisoners of war were for most practical purpose regarded as wives, and the Qur'an forbade the practice of hiring out concubines to other men as prostitutes.

The wisdom behind permission of taking slave girls as concubines in Islam is that they will one day become mothers of their masters, and automatically both the mother and child become free. The Messenger of Allah is reported to have said:

"*Any slave woman who gives birth to a child by her master, then she is free after his death."* (Quoted Al-Jaza'iry, 2001.p.553)

Islam allowed the women in concubinage to prevent some other possibly worse experiences for the concubine. We all know that in those days there were no prisoners of war camps, assuming that she was taken captive; there were all possibility for her/them to

be attacked and be raped. Even today in the 21st century, there are some horrifying systematic rape of Muslim women in refugee camps in Bosnia, Palestine, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq etc. As mentioned earlier, the practice of concubinage was found in other Semitic cultures, and is referred to in several places in the Bible (Acts 2:29, 1 Samuel 5:13).

In the Sunnah, Silas quoted a tradition of the Prophet collected by *Bukhari* claiming that *"Muslims in the battle of Banu Mustaliq had taken female slaves and had sex with them."*

Reported by *Ibn Muhairiz* that he said, "*I entered the Mosque and I saw Abaa Said Al-Khudri and sat beside him and asked him about the legality of coitus interrupts (withdrawal just before ejaculation).*[1] *Abu Said replied: we went out with Allah's Messenger for the battle of Banu Mustaliq and we received captives from among the Arabs and we desired women and celibacy became hard on us and we loved to do coitus interruptus without asking Allah's Messenger while he is present among us? We asked him about it and he said: 'there is no harm if you do so, for if any soul till the Day resurrection is predestined to exist, it will exist'. "* (*fathul bari commentary of sahihl bukhari* Vol: 7, Hadith No: 4138.p522)

There is nowhere in the above Hadith mentioned that the Companions had taken female slaves and had sex with them. Actually, the subject matter of the Hadith was a question on the legality of coitus interruptus in Islam. Mr. Silas similarly, committed a lot of translation errors when he was trying to translate the text from Arabic to English. This is just one of many other misinterpretations of Islamic text perpetrated either deliberately or ignorantly by the people claiming to be experts in Islamic studies.

The Really Perpetrators of Slavery and Slave Trade in Africa

Much has been written and said on slavery and slave trade by Christian missionaries and European scholars. Muslims have not been let behind on that as well. Unfortunately, most of the truth about this trade has been hidden or distorted. The main reason for all that is to create fallacy about it and associate it with Islam and Muslims. Under this section, we shall therefore expose the truth of the matter and present the true perpetrators of this immoral business who are hidden for hundreds of years. It has clearly to be understood that the Arabs were not the only perpetrators of slavery and slave trade as it has been spread by the Church and the Christina missionaries. Several other communities such as

[1] This was the common method of contraception at the time of the Prophet (saw) which was allowed by the Prophet himself. The companions of the Prophet engaged in this practice during the period the Qur'an was being revealed to him and it was not prohibited.

Europeans, French people, Indians, Africans, *Shirazi* people (from Iran), Americans, portages, Germans, Chinese to mention but few they all participated in such business. All these communities have not been mentioned in this scandal of slave trade except the Arabs (Muslims). Although there are non-Muslim Arabs, but most of the Arabs participated in slavery in Africa, happen to be Muslims. Hence, many non-Muslim writers used that to accuse Islam, Muslims, Arabs and Swahili people as the perpetrators of slavery and slave trade in East Africa. Thus, a British writer Batten, T.R. in his book titled; "*Tropical Africa in World History.p.128*" quoted by *Al-Islamily* said:

> "*The Arabs who brought Islam to Africa are the same ones who brought slavery and slave trade and all other types of injustice.*" (Al-Ismaily, 1999 p.143-145).

These types of propaganda were used and still being spread by Christians and European/African Missionaries in order to plant hatred among the non-Muslims within and outside Africa. The propaganda against Islam and Muslim on slaver never got spread by Missionaries only, but even politicians who were trend and brought up by the Church had similar concept. For example the late Tanzanian President J. Kambarage Nyerere as quoted by Prof. Sendaro said:

> *"Zanzibar was the fort which the Arabs used in conducting slave trade… Zanzibar was the stem of the expression of cruelty of Arabs in East Africa, the port and market of commodities from the hinterland: ivory, tusks and slaves… "* (Sendaro, 1997.p.21).

Similarly, these anti-Islamic sentiments prevailed even in the highest political leaders in Kenya. This was demonstrated by the former Kenyan President D. Arap Moi in a Madaraka Day address on 1 June, 1992 when he reminded non-Muslim Kenyans in a typical colonial-missionary style as quoted that:

> "*Islam and Muslims had been responsible for enslavement of your forefathers*" (Mazrui, Al-Amin M. Ibrahim Shariff.p.1994.p.157)

The pending questions here which both Nyerere and Moi did not answer are: **what was the destination of these slaves? Who benefitted much from this business? For whose interest was this slave trade was conducted? Whose slave trade was it?**

Fortunately enough, these questions were adequately answered by a historian Prof. Walter Rodney and exposed clearly the true perpetrators of slavery and slave trade in Africa.

> "*The slave trade on the Indian Ocean has been called the East Africa Slave Trade and the Arabs slave trade for so long that it hides the extent to which it was also a*

> *European slave trade. When the slave trade in Africa was at its height in the 18th century and in the early 19th century, the destination of most of the captives was the European Mauritius, Reunion and Seychelles-as well as the Americans, via the Cape of Good Hope. Besides, Africans labouring as slaves in certain Arab countries in the 18th and 19th centuries were all ultimately serving the European capitalist system which set up a demand for slave-grown products, such as the cloves grown in Zanzibar under the supervision of Arab masters* " (Sendaro,1997.p.21)

According to the Bible, a slave is supposed to be cast out and the son of a slave is not allowed to inherit with a son of a freewoman. The Bible says:

> *"But what does the scripture say? 'Cast out the salve and her son; for the son of the salve shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.' So, brethren, we are not the children of the salve but of the free woman"* (Galatians 5: 30-31 Revised STD Version.p.977).

The above verse is talking about the two sons of Ibrahim (Abraham). The son of the slave woman is Isma'il and the son of the free woman is Ishaq. Based on the above arguments, the true perpetrators of slave trade are:

1) Capitalist Christian nations with an intention of developing Capitalism in Europe and America. The Christian capitalist countries engaged in slavery to develop and improve their economy (Kheir, & Yahya 2007.p.373).

2) The Church was in front line to participate in slavery and slave tread. That was through the teachings of St. Paul and not Jesus' teachings (1 Timothy 6:1-2, Colossians 3:22-24, Good News Bible). The Church also participated in establishing racism and slavery as clearly mentioned in the story of Prophet Noah (Geneses 9:21). In addition to that, the Bible encourages beating of salves and if the slave survives death, the owner shall not be punished because the slave according to the Bible is his/her money (Exodus, 21: 20-21, Bible Revised STD Version). Contrary to the teaching of the Bible, the Prophet said:

> *"Whoever beats his slave or strikes him as a punishment for something he did not do, then verily his expiation is to free him"* (Collected by Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Quoted by Al-Jaza'iry, 2001.p.553)

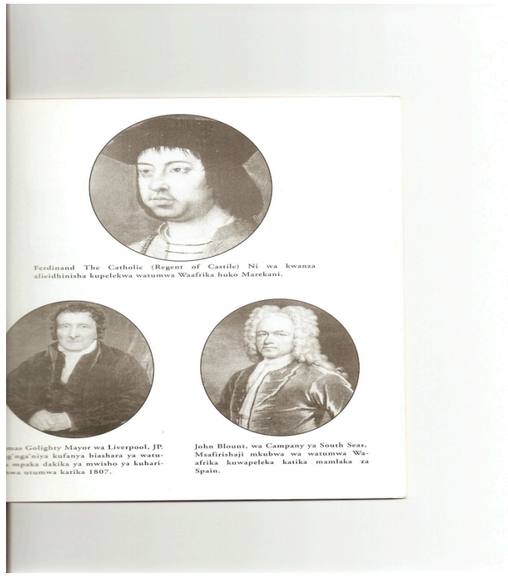
Ferdinand The Catholic (Regent of Castile) Ni wa kwanza alieidhinisha kupelekwa watumwa Waafrika huko Marekani.
John Blount, wa Campany ya South Seav. Mnafrichaji mkubwa wa watumwa Waafrika kuwapeleka katika mamlaka za Spain.

Figure 1

The above figure 1 are pictures of some Capitalist Christian leaders who were great perpetrators of slavery and slave tread in Africa. The first top picture is Ferdinand the Catholic (Regent of Castile), the second from left is Thomas Golighty Mayor of Liverpool, JP 1807, the third from right is John Blount use to send slave to Spain (Al-Islamaily, 1999.p.270-271).

3) The Pope of Rome in 1491 was one of the perpetrators of this immoral trade. The Pope issued Popal Bulls which divided the world into two parts for the European nations. The King of Portugal was given the Eastern part of the world and King of Spain in the Western part. The Pope then instructed these kings "*to go and reduce all infidels into slavery*" (Sendaro, 1997.p.16).

4) Christopher Columbus who was also known as Christoperens (Christ's emissary) landed in America and committed killings of the red Indians and later the African slaves. This bitter history led the Pope John Paul II to apologised to the Black Americans in 1992 (Kheir, & Yahya 2007 p.374. see also Sendaro, 1997.p.17).

5) Americans were the main perpetrators of African slave trade between 1731 and 1867. Most of these slaves were Muslims from South of the Sahara desert between Senegal and Lake Chad. It is recorded that between 15 and 20% of

Africans brought to North America were Muslims. During the slave trading years, more than 10 million Africans were taken from their lands. Many of these Muslim slaves were Fula, Fulbe, Fulani, Hausa, Manding, Mandinga, Massina, Kanuri, Kassonke, Srahule, Temne, Mende, Moor, and Arab. These slaves were from the Islamic empires of Songhai, Ghana, and Mali. Many of these Muslims who were taken as slaves were forced to become Christians. These include Job ibn Solomon Jallo, Yarrow Mamout, Lamine Jay Ibrahim Abdulrahman, Kunta Kinte, Lamen Kebe, Omar ibn Said, Slih Bilali, Samba to mention but few (Muhammad, A. N. A.1998.p.9-11).

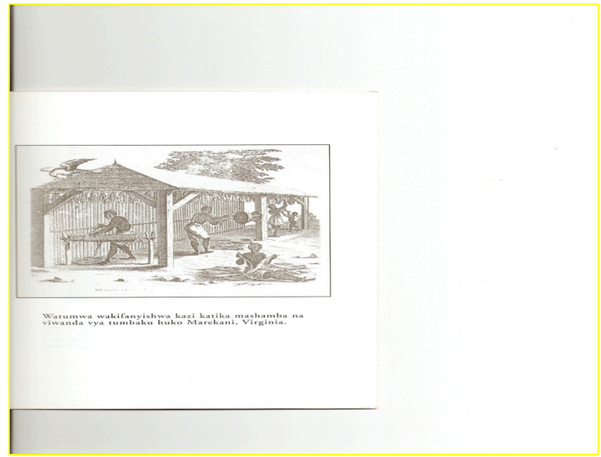

Figure 2

Figure 2 is one of the pictures of African slaves working in tobacco farms and industries in Virginia, USA in 1772 (Al-Islamaily, 1999.p.270-271).

6) Unfortunately, there were few individual Arabs who worked for the European slave dealers in Zanzibar in East Africa this incident is taken by many non-Muslims as evidence that Islam supported/supports slavery and slave trade (Sendaro,1997.p23). But we have already answered that in the previous topic where we presented the Islamic view point on slavery.

Conclusion

For many decades the issue of slavery and slave trade has been a controversial issue to non-Muslims as well as to Muslims. Many people have been confusingly or deliberately relating slavery with Islam. Historically, slavery was there many centuries even before the birth of Prophet Jesus (pbuh). Thus, both in the Qur'an and the Bible slavery has been mentioned in several places. Even in the history of Prophets of Allah (sw), slavery existed during their lifetime, to the extent that some of them were victims of the same (e.g. Ishmael & Joseph). However, slavery has also been known among humanity for thousands of years. It was found to exist among the most ancient people of the world, like Egyptians, the Chinese, the Indians, the Greeks, the Romans the Arabs and even the Africans. When Prophet Muhammad (saw) came to the Arabian Peninsula with the mission peace (Islam), he got slavery was widely practised among the Arabs.

However, Prophet Muhammad (saw) through the major source (Qur'an) of Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) made the business of slavery totally forbidden and prohibited. Hence, Islam introduced various ways of freeing the slaves; when a man had sexual intercourse with his wife in the daytime of *Ramadhan,* his penalty is to free a slave. A Muslim who killed a fellow Muslim by mistake he/she has to set a slave free. When a Muslim commits *Dhihar*, which is to say to his wife "*you are like the back of my mother*"[1] he has to free a slave. A Muslim who fails to fulfil a sworn oath he is also required to set a slave free. Slaves who could buy their freedom were immediately freed. Slaves who embraced Islam became free immediately. Slaves who taught a number of Muslims how to read and write were left free. Slave women who got legally married to their masters automatically became free and as well as their children. Among the best righteous deeds loved by Allah (sw) that merit paradise is the paying of ransom for a slave in order to let him/her gain freedom. Islam therefore came to abolish the slave tread even before the slavery convention of 1926. Hence, when the Arabs and Europeans came with the 18th and 19th century slavery in East Africa, Islam had already forbidden that business. However, it is important to note that whatever is done by an Arab dose not present Islam.

The paper has successfully managed to present different definitions related to the term slavery, the Islamic viewpoint on slavery, misconceptions and misinterpretations about slavery. The study has also directed the reader to exactly know who the true perpetrators of slavery and slave trade are that took place in Africa.

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[1] Metaphorical means "I am not going to have sex with anymore"

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